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The academic structure and organization within the Romanian higher education system from the perspective of the Bologna process. Practical application for Technical Higher Education institutions

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Abstract

The present study analyze the way in which the new academic organization (as one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process) has been implemented within the technical higher education in Romania during 2005-2008. The results obtained after we conduct a research in 28 technical Romanian universities prove, that some studied universities have taken significant steps towards the implementation of the new academic organization, and other studied universities have to analyze more profoundly and more thoroughly the aspects entailed by the implementation of the new academic organization, so that its put into practice within the institution would be more efficient.

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1. The status of the problem

By adhering to the Bologna Process, the signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration of 1999, have adopted and accepted the need for a change of paradigm within the higher education. The change of paradigm imposes a series of profound transformations of the European higher education, both substantial and formal. The profound substantial changes refer to the restructuring of the curricula, to the assurance of quality and to the cooperation towards its assurance, to the guarantee of the European Credit Transfer

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System, to the promotion of mobility, to the connection between higher education and research, to the increase of the access to higher education of students that have socio-economic problems, to the implementation and maintenance of an European dimension of higher education, to the promotion of life long learning and to the development of some coherent strategies that should meet this goal.

The profound transformations concerning the shape of the higher education system regard, in fact, the change of the university structure at European level through the implementation of a common structure that has three successive and cumulative cycles: the 1st cycle, Diploma Paper or Bachelor Degree, 2nd cycle, Master's Degree and the 3rd cycle, Doctor's Degree. The Diploma Paper cycle, lasts for 3 or 4 years. The studies of the 1st cycle for the evening education, part-time education or distance education have variable spans according to the institution that organizes them. The Master's Degree cycle lasts for 1 or 2 years, according to the duration of the 1st cycle and to the number of credits obtained. The Doctor's Degree cycle consists of a period of three years dedicated to university studies and of another period of no more than other three years, time when the PhD thesis should be elaborated and defended. Parallel with the structure of 3+2+3, there exists, as an exception to the rule, for the professions for which a three year period was considered to be too short in order to get a satisfactory qualification, acceptable on the work force market (e.g. medicine and architecture studies), a structure in which the first two cycles are condensed; this structure is called in specialized literature, the single cycle or the long master's cycle (Singer and Sarivan [coord.], 2006).

The main studies that are monitoring the progress of every higher education system in Europe, along the action established by the Bologna Process, reveal some important aspects regarding the implementation of the new academic organization within the European Community.

According to the Bologna Process Stocktaking Report Leuven/Louvain-la Neuve 2009, conducted by the work groups entitled The Conference of European Ministers of Education, "in comparison to the year 2007, the European signatory countries of the Bologna Process, have registered a progress in the implementation of the new higher education structure – especially in what the entrance to the Master's Degree cycle and the introduction of the Doctor's Degree cycle are concerned (Rauhvargers, Deane and Pauwels 200, pp. 6-7).

The Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process rapport, conducted by Eurydice (The Network that analyses the Education systems and policies in Europe) in all of the 46 signatory countries of the Bologna Process, shows that the "three cycle structure has expanded in all the countries and in almost all the universities and the university curricula"(Eurydice 2009, pp. 20-21).

The study entitled Sistemul universitar românesc. Opiniile cadrelor didactice și ale studenților (The Romanian Academic System. Opinions of Teachers and Students), conducted in 2007 by Mircea Comșa, Claudiu D. Tufiş and Bogdan Voicu on a sample of 1.007 university teachers and 1.171 students from the first cycle of study (Diploma Paper), reveals that "in what the new three cycle structure (Diploma Paper, Master's Degree, Doctor's Degree) of the academic system is concerned, the majority (80%) of the teachers surveyed state that it represents an efficient way of organizing the academic studies" (Comșa, Tufiş and Voicu, 2007, pp. 48-50).

Another study conducted by the Alianța Națională a Organizațiilor Studențești din România (2009), Implementarea Procesului Bologna în România: Perspectiva Studenților (National Alliance of the Students' Organizations from Romania The Implementation of the Bologna Process in Romania: The Students' Perspective, 2009), on a number of 23 public universities from Romania reveals the fact that although the students' opinion is that the Bologna Process has been superficially implemented by the universities comprised in the study, they do tend to agree that some of the progress that has been registered concerning the implementation of the Bologna Process is mainly represented by the implementation of the three year cycle.

2. The aim of the study

Our study has as a major aim the analysis of the way in which the objective of the Bologna Process concerning the academic organization has been implemented within the technical higher education in Romania during 2005-2008.

3. Methodology

In order to carry out the present study we have resorted to a research method conducted through an investigation that has taken place in 28 technical universities or universities that have in their structure faculties with a technical profile and that are comprised in the Romanian system of higher education.

For conducting the research investigation we have created, following the survey method, our own research instrument – a self evaluating grid for each university, concerning the implementation of the Bologna Process within the institutions. The self evaluating grid has been applied to the pro-rectors responsible with the education process within the technical universities or within the universities that have in their structure faculties with a technical profile, comprised in the Romanian higher education system.

The aspects we have studied along the line of the implementation of the new academic organization within the Romanian technical higher education institutions, have taken into consideration the following: the legislation of higher education, the internal legislation of the university, the three cycle university structure, the putting into effect of the university cycles, the Bachelor Degree, the Master's Degree and the Doctor's Degree. For each one of these aspects we have identified the variables that need to be studied; then we have formulated for these variables minimal and reference descriptors (these are going to be referred to as D. throughout the paper). The minimal descriptors represent the minimal compulsory level at which a certain activity must be fulfilled, the easiest way of achieving it, the cheapest means or the most accessible method, allowed by law or by current practice, used in order to fulfill a function or activity (in a grading system this level might correspond to the "satisfactory" or to the minimal scale). The reference descriptors expressed the added value or the ideal level, the desirable situation, the improved version under which that certain activity unfurls (this level could represent the "very well" position on an eventual reference scale).

4. Research findings and outcomes

Analyzing the high frequencies of the answers offered by the investigated universities regarding the implementation of the Academic organization, as being one of the objectives of the Bologna Process comprised in the study, we may state that, in general a percentage of 1,3% of the investigated universities have not implemented this objective; 7,1% of the universities have implemented the objective at the level of the minimal descriptors that form it, complying and fulfilling its compulsory requirements; 25,3% of the universities have registered a progress as compared to the minimal descriptors without reaching however the above mentioned objective's reference descriptors; a percentage of 66,3% of the investigated universities (which is a rather significant percentage of the universities comprised in the study) have implemented the objective at the level of the reference descriptors also (see Figure 1.).

The very high added percentage (98,7%) of the investigated universities that have answered *satisfactory, well and very well*, concerning the objective of the *Academic organization* – stipulated by the Bologna Process, represents the percentage of the universities comprised in the study that have implemented this objective of the European higher education reform (at least at the level of its minimal requirements); it also comes to point out the interest the majority of the investigated universities have for

the following: the alignment to the requirements of the present legislation regarding the higher education and its correlation to the Bologna Process; the formulation of the university's mission and objectives; the establishment of a managerial structure and of some internal regulations by which the institution should be administered; the implementation of the new higher education structure that should be in accordance with the European higher education reform; the accreditation of the program of studies offered for the Bachelor and the Master's Degree cycles; the distinctiveness of the three cycles of university studies (Bachelor Degree, Master's Degree and Doctor's Degree); the creation of a distinctive curricula for the three cycles of university studies.

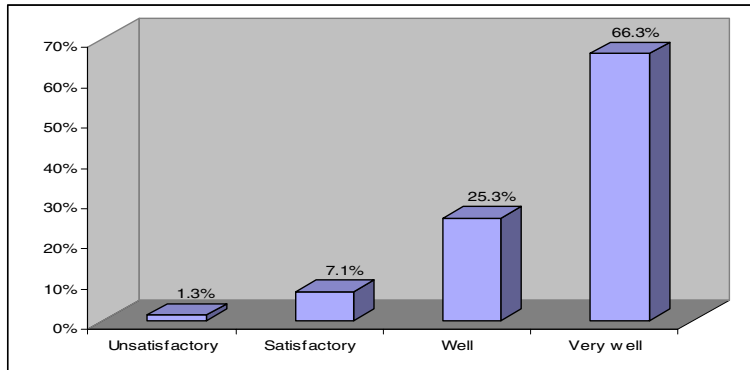


Fig. 1. The situation of the implementation within the technical higher education of the objective Academic Organization (D.1. – D.11.)

The significant percentage of 66,3% of universities that have managed to obtain the reference descriptors concerning the *Academic organization*, comes to reflect the tendency of the investigated universities of achieving the added value of the above mentioned objective by implementing a better way of unfolding the activities entailed by the objective. Trying to expand and detail the results of our study, we could safely say that the 66,3% of the universities that have achieved the reference descriptors entailed by the objective of *Academic organization*, represent the present main concerns and tendencies of the investigated universities, regarding the implementation within the institution of this objective; these main concerns and tendencies are: the perception of the fact that legislation plays a very important part within the institutional development, as well as in the information and the continuing education of the university teachers; the concern of the higher education institutions for the formulation of its mission, objectives and structures by which to conduct itself, as well as for the formulation of a series of stipulations that should be known and applied by all the members of the university staff in order to achieve the established objectives and for an excellent functioning of the higher education institution; the sustained efforts for the accreditation and the periodic evaluation of the programs of study offered by the universities in order to assure the quality and the increase of their competitiveness on the work force market; the acknowledgement of the importance of the existence and of the functioning within the university of the *Regulations concerning the organization and the deployment of the academic cycles (Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Doctor's Degree)*, for the well functioning of the educational process; the progress registered by some universities regarding the fulfillment of one of the major requirements of the Bologna Process, namely, the implementation of the three academic cycles: Bachelor' Degree, Master's Degree and Doctor's Degree.; the offering of diversified courses during the three academic cycles.

The very low percent, 1,3% of the investigated universities, that have not implemented the Academic Organization Objective, reveals the fact that within the Romanian technical higher education, there are

only few universities left that are faced with some problems concerning the implementation of the *Academic Structure* (0,9%) and the *Creation of the Academic Cycles: Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Doctor's Degree* (5,4%).

5. Research limits of the present study

We have to mention the fact that in the development of this study we have taken into account the following limitations: the difficulties we have encountered in the development of the research instrument, the absence of a specialized team on the educational field that would contribute to the elaboration of the above mentioned research; the unbalanced rapport between the public and the private universities taking into account in our study; the impossibility of gathering a sample of at least 30 universities; the presence of the social desirability in the responses offered by the university representatives.

6. Conclusions

By applying the self evaluating grid within the technical universities we have been able to observe that the main objective of the Bologna Process concerning the academic organization has been implemented by 98,7% of the universities that have been comprised in the study, at least at the level of its minimal requirements; this indicates that the Romanian technical higher education has begun to take significant steps along one of the most important lines of the Bologna Process, namely the implementation of the new academic organization. Despite the very high percentage of universities that have managed to implement the academic organization, at least at the level of its minimal requirements, there is, however, a percentage of 1,3% of the universities that have been comprised in the study, that have not implemented the above mentioned objective, which comes to indicate the existence of some difficulties in what the implementation of the objective is concerned. We consider that an enhanced understanding of the meaning and the outcome of the *Academic organization*, would lead to an enhanced familiarity and implementation of this objective at an institutional level within the Romanian technical universities.

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